editor receives such an accolade from a Ph.D. in English. And she may quote me to her students! — *Ed.*)

I have been a member of the Church of Christ for 40 years, and I've heard all these years that we are the only church, *the* church. But I believe that anyone who accepts Jesus as Lord and is buried with him in baptism is added to the universal church, which is Christ's Body. If the Holy Spirit is in a person, that is what counts, not what sign is on the building, whether Church of Christ or Baptist. How dare they tell God who He can save! — *a sister in Christ, Chillicothe, Mo*

(While I do not usually publish unsigned letters, I make an exception this time to "a sister in Christ," partly because a lifetime in sectarianism has made her angry. She dared me to print this. I delight in taking the dare, for she is exactly what we need, people who are fed up with our whole sectarian mess and who say so in no uncertain terms. When enough people show their indignation to our leadership, we will find some relief from this sectarian nonsense. — *Ed.*)

BOOK NOTES

What Christ Thinks of the Church by John R. W. Stott is drawn from the seven letters to the churches in Revelation and is most insightful in showing what the church ought to be. It also gives one a deeper appreciation of the book of Revelation. $6.50 postpaid.

We have a new supply of the three books of devotional writings that we have frequently recommended in this column, but we regret that there has been a sharp increase in their cost. We can get them only from Scotland, and this may be the last time we will offer them. Two are by William Barclay: *The Plain Man's Book of Prayers* and *More Prayers for the Plain Man.* The price is $6.95 each. The prayers are beautiful, meaningful, and uplifting, and each is accompanied by a portion of Scripture, which makes them ideal for family devotions. The third book is *A Diary of Private Prayer* by John Baillie, which are the most soul-searching prayers I have ever read. It is $7.95. If you order all three the price is $20.00 postpaid.

I am presently reading with both joy and profit Mitch Simpson's *What the Bible Says About Prayer.* The author is a great soul and he has put his soul and mind alike into this study. You will not only know more about prayer but you will pray better after reading this book. $13.95 postpaid.

What the Bible Says About Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage by Olan Hicks is disturbing some sacred cows. This book not only deals with all the questions that are raised on this subject but it comes to terms in a forceful way with all the prooftexts that have been used to prove too much. We are gratified that this liberating study is receiving a wide reading among Churches of Christ. $13.95 postpaid.

We have a few more copies of Carl Ketcherside's *That The World May Believe,* which was originally issued as *The Death of the Custodian.* This book is otherwise out of print. $3.95 each while they last.

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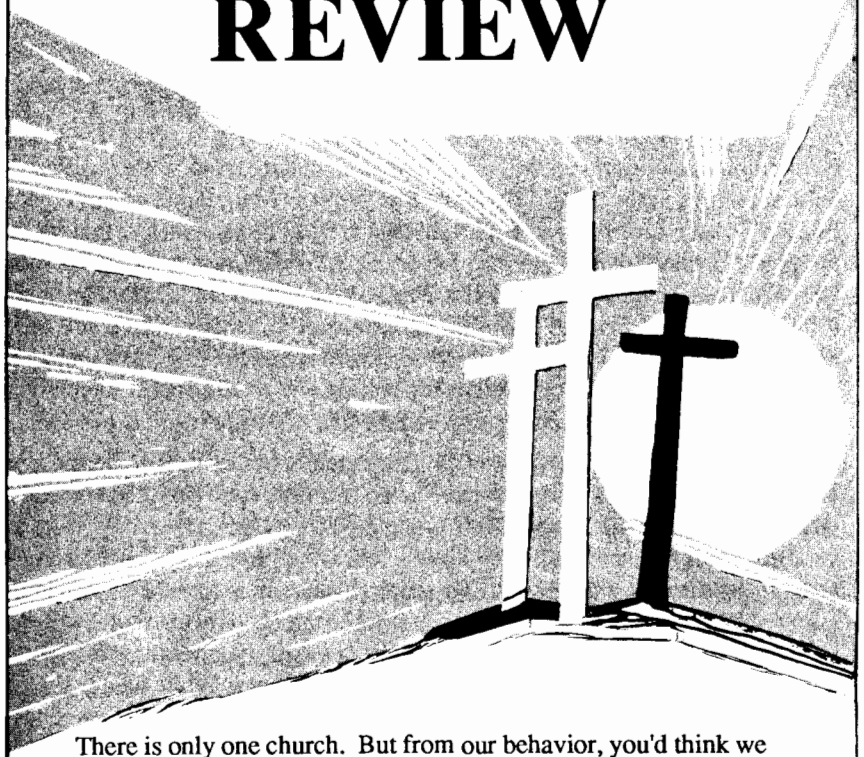

There is only one church. But from our behavior, you'd think we believe that when we get to heaven God will divide us into different sections so we can huddle together within our little group or denomination. Worse still, some behave as if their group will be the only one there. But when we do get to heaven we'll all be one. So why not get a head start and begin getting to know Christians of other denominations and groups now?--*Floyd McClung*

In This Issue:

Christian Unity in a New Zealand Village

Volume 30, No. 10 **Leroy Garrett, Editor** **December, 1988**

THE "MAKE A DIFFERENCE" RULE

And making a difference, having compassion indeed on some. — Jude 22

This translation by James MacKnight of Jude 22, a difficult passage, is suggestive of an important rule of interpretation: *We are to recognize the vital distinctions that appear in Scripture.* This means that we are to "make a difference" between things in the Bible. We know that Christ is more important than Moses, that the New Testament is more relevant than the Old Testament, and that Mt. Zion is a greater symbol of the faith than Mt. Sinai. And even among the things said by Christ and his apostles, some things are more important than others. The "make a difference" rule recognizes that while all truths are equally true all truths are not equally important. It is true also of error. There are errors of greater import than other errors. Our Lord not only referred to weightier matters but to an unpardonable sin. He was drawing the kind of distinctions that this installment deals with.

The passage in Jude refers not to interpretation but to reclaiming those who have fallen into sin. Those who have erred from the faith out of ignorance and weakness are to be shown compassion, and gentle methods of persuasion are to be used in reclaiming them. But others, as the following verse shows, such as ungodly teachers who have erred through corruption of heart, may have to be roughed up, such as "snatching them out of the fire" of the wrath of God. One method appeals to love, the other to fear. People are different and circumstances are different, and so we are to "make a difference" in the way we treat them. While we are always to act out of love, love is sometimes tender and sometimes tough. The same loving hands that apply soothing ointment may sometimes use a scapel.

Jesus recognized this principle when he upbraided (implying severe language) the cities where most of his miracles had been performed. The cities were Korazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, and it is noteworthy that we know little about what he did in these cities except that "most" of his mighty works were done in them. But Jesus knew what he had done there and he knew how much of heaven's light had been given to them. But in their unrepentance they rejected him and turned their backs to heaven's light. He therefore upbraided them with severe denunciation: "Woe to you, Korazin, Woe to you, Bethsaida, if the miracles that were performed

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in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you , it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you" (Mt. 11:21-22).

He was even harder on Capernaum, telling them they will be brought down to hell, and assuring them that ancient Sodom (of all people!) would have repented and not been destroyed if they had seen such light as shone upon Capernaum. Even wicked Sodom, therefore, would fare better in the judgment than Capernaum. Insofar as we know these cities did not raise a hand against Jesus and did not cast a single stone his way. They were willfully negligent and indifferent. They could not have cared less. Is Jesus saying that this sin is worse than sodomy?

His attitude toward another city was different still, a mixture of compassion and judgment: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing" (Mt. 23:37). While he goes on to point to the desolation that will come upon the city, he sees it as one day crying out, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."

Even though Jerusalem had stoned the prophets and "were not willing," he did not judge it as he did the cities of Galilee. Only God sees the heart and knows why people are not willing. It is much more difficult for some people to see and accept the truth than for others. Jesus always made the difference.

This is the way we are to look at Scripture. We are to make a difference by recognizing the vital distinctions that are in the Bible, such as exists between law and grace, in the Old Testament as well as the New.

While God is always the great lawgiver in Scripture, He is even more the God of grace and mercy. Jesus was forceful in making this distinction. While he knew that God had legislated all manner of laws in regard to sacrifice, he now and again quoted Hosea 6:6, "I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings," to show that it is grace and mercy that count most with God (see Mt. 9:13, 12:7).

It was only when David had grievously sinned and had drunk from the cup of remorse that he could pray to God: "You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and contrite heart" (Ps. 51:16-17). The prophet Micah learned only in the atmosphere of a court of law that it was not "thousands of rams or ten thousand rivers of oil" that the Lord wanted," despite all the laws and ritual in the Old Testament, but "He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8).

That the God of Scripture is always and foremost a God of love, grace, and mercy is one of the great truths of the Bible that continues to be overlooked, one that our Lord sought in vain to teach the Pharisees. Grace overrules law in the Old

Testament and the New alike. Early on in Scripture God is described as "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty" (Ex. 34:6-7). Human need always transcends law.

Another vital distinction in Scripture is seen in the progressive nature of revelation, which begins rather crudely in the garden of Eden where a snake is depicted as talking, and ends in Revelation with God speaking from His throne, declaring He will make all things new. The brazen serpent on a pole in the Old Testament, to which the people looked for healing, pointed to the dying Savior on the Cross in the New Testament. The church of wandering nomads in the Old Testament becomes the Church of Christ in the New Testament.

Alexander Campbell illustrated this distinction by reference to varying degrees of light. He described the Patriarchal Age as the starlight age, for while the revelation it received through the heads of clans was limited there was nonetheless some light. And so Enoch walked with God and Abraham was called the friend of God. Then came the Mosaic Dispensation or the Age of the Prophets, which Campbell called the moonlight age, in which there was much more light, so much that Isaiah can be referred to as "the evangelical prophet."

At the close of the moonlight age, on the very last page of the Old Testament, Malachi refers to "the Sun of Righteousness" that was soon to come, introducing what Campbell called the sunlight age, which brought the full measure of God's revelation to man through Jesus Christ. Since Malachi also referred to the Elijah that was to come, preparing the way for the Messiah, Campbell saw the short dispensation of John the Baptist as the dawn or the twilight age of God's revelation. God sends more light as mankind is prepared to accept it — from starlight to moonlight to the dawning of the perfect day, and at last the Sun of Righteousness.

This is not only beautiful imagery, but it points to a crucial distinction made in Scripture. We are to interpret events in the Bible in reference to the dispensation in which they occurred and by the measure of light there was to guide the people. Moses, Abraham, and David were not always exemplary in their behavior, but we are to judge them in the light of the age in which they lived and not by the greater light of Christian morality. They did not have Christ to look to as we have, and what a difference he makes! The writer of Hebrews was very conscious of this vital distinction, for he referred to the worthy saints of past ages as not having received "the promise," and then adds, "God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us" (Heb. 11:40). But he also makes the point that as we have greater light we have greater responsibility!

We interpret the Bible more responsibly when we recognize the many distinctions it makes, such as between unbelief and disbelief, though the English translation may not always make this distinction immediately apparent. Unbelief is the result of having never heard, while disbelief is having heard and rejected the

message. It is always the disbeliever that is condemned in Scripture, not the unbeliever.

The distinction between the teaching or doctrine of the apostles and the preaching of the gospel is another vital distinction that the Scriptures always make. The gospel is the good news of what God has done through Christ, which, when believed and obeyed, makes us Christians and brings us into fellowship with God and with each other. Once we are Christians we are enrolled in the school of Christ, to use Biblical imagery, in which we are taught the apostolic curriculum or the apostles' doctrine. We thus enter into fellowship by means of the gospel; we are educated and strengthened in the fellowship by means of doctrine. We ignore this distinction and invite grievous errors when we suppose that everything in the New Testament is the gospel.

We should also recognize the distinction between a covenant and the writings of a covenant people. The old covenant is not what we call the Old Testament, but the law that God gave to Moses on Mt. Sinai, the Ten Commandments. The Old Testament is really the Old Covenant Scriptures, or the Scriptures of a covenant people. Likewise the New Covenant is the agreement we have with Jesus Christ, entered into upon baptism; it is being a member of his Body, the church. The church eventually produced writings that became part of the Holy Scriptures. We may call these the New Testament, but they are really the New Covenant Scriptures. This means that the New Testament (Covenant) became a reality at Pentecost, long before there were any such writings that we call the New Testament.

This is a most crucial distinction, for if we are to be a covenant people we must realize that our covenantal relationship is with a Person, not a book. That covenantal relationship with a Person produced a book, not the other way around! This is why unity and fellowship are based upon a covenantal relationship with Christ and with each other, not upon conformity of agreement upon everything in what we call "the New Testament."

We could also have been spared lots of grief over the "marriage, divorce, and remarriage" controversy if we had honored the distinctions inherent in the verses used as prooftexts, such as Mt.19:9, which reads "Whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery." The context makes it clear that Jesus is answering a question as to whether it is right for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason, which he answers in the negative. It is not a question about divorce and remarriage. *Jesus' reply shows that he is against divorce for married people, not against marriage for divorced people.* And yet the whole controversy has centered around the right of divorced people to marry, a thing Jesus never questioned. The Bible never questions the right of unmarried people to marry, and that is what divorce means, that people who were once married are no longer married.

We may also err in making distinctions that the Bible does not make, such as carving a professional clergy out of the priesthood of all believers, or discriminating against women when the Scriptures insist that in Christ there is neither male nor female. Or allowing race and color to make a difference. But that is another subject. — *the Editor.*

TEACHING THE BIBLE IN INDIA
(Written in India)

Teaching foreigners on an American campus is a common experience for a professor, for we have tens of thousands of students from virtually every country in the world in our colleges and universities. I had many young ladies from foreign countries in my classes at Texas Woman's University, especially from Southeast Asia. It is far less common and distinctly different when it is the professor who is the foreigner and he is teaching in a cultural setting greatly different from his own. I have now done this in numerous nations of the world — Japan, Korea, Thailand, Uruguay, Taiwan — and I always find it a delightful challenge. Sometimes one can teach in English in these situations, but usually it is by translation. One would suppose that teaching by translation would be a serious obstacle, but it has its advantages. Every teacher who is given to abstruseness and verbosity should be required occasionally to teach by translation. He will find it an exercise in clarity and conciseness. In teaching through a translator one cannot easily hide behind a lot of verbage. He learns to "put a point on it," which is not a bad rule for any and all teaching.

Teaching the Bible in a foreign country has its hazards, particularly in a third world country, for the Bible has been translated and interpreted through the centuries by first world scholars. It is very difficult for us to see the Scriptures through third world eyes. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, for instance, the third world Christian is likely to see himself as the man who was beaten and robbed by thieves, while those who "pass by on the other side" are professed Christians of rich countries. He sees his own country as the poor, the oppressed, the captives, and "those of low estate" that God and the Bible defend and that Christ came to deliver. But non-poor Christians somehow miss the emphasis given to the poor in the Bible.

If you are teaching a class in India you may have a man in your class who only the day before bore his dead baby to the river on the back of his bicycle, decked with garlands, for he had no money for ceremonial cremation. A student may have a critically ill parent or child and no money for medical help. Some will have rotting teeth and no money for a dentist. If your students can read and write, they may be the only ones in their families who can, illiteracy in this country being as high as

50%. By contrast, it is less than 1% in Japan, the nation with the highest rate of literacy in the world. Some of my students here were raised in an orphanage, forsaken by their parents who were too poor to keep them. Baby girls, who are worth less in third world cultures, are often left at the gate of some orphanage.

How will a class of students representing such a culture interpret the Bible, and how will they view their foreign teacher, who is to them a rich Christian? And how is the teacher affected when he is aware of the gulf between them? There is the story of a professor that came from an American Bible college to teach for awhile in these parts. During a layover in Calcutta he dared to walk about the city, where one sees incredible squalor and wretched souls dying on the streets. The professor hurried back to his hotel room and took refuge there until a flight could deliver him from such cultural shock. What happens when such a one is in a class situation with students who live in such a world?

And the questions are different. It may be simple enough to teach one how to become a Christian, but suppose you are in India where it is against the law to convert anyone from Hinduism or Islam until he is 18 years of age, and even then it is risky, for the convert may lose his place in society and even be forsaken by family. If you run an orphanage and have kids ready to be baptized at age 12 or 14, what do you do? If you baptize them before they are 18, the government might close your operation and cancel your visa. Already the government has stopped the flow of new missionaries, allowing the older ones to remain until they die off. Orientals understand the meaning of baptism and do not consider anyone a Christian until he has been baptized (to the consternation of the Baptists who are here!), so a young person can make a profession of faith (and some have advised that they should then start taking the Lord's Supper) with a view of being baptized at age 18.

It is also simple enough to teach a class Paul's sermon to the Athenians in Acts 17, where he proclaimed "the unknown God" as one who does not dwell in temples made by hands nor served by the art of man's devising in the likeness of gold, silver, or stone. But how do you respond when a student points out that if he says such things to his Hindu neighbors, who have such temples and devices of precious stone, that they will be offended and accuse him of sacrilege? We can always point to the offensive character of the gospel and remind students that Christ himself was killed because he taught unpopular truths, but it is easy for one to say that who will soon be gone and will not have to suffer the abuse of being a Christian in a pagan world.

I pointed out that Paul in Athens, even when surrounded by idolatry, showed respect for the people's religion. He did not criticize or make fun, but set forth the positive qualities of the God they acknowledged they did not know. And he quoted from their own poets and philsophers and drew truths from their own sources. We too can draw truths and values from the great non-Christian religions, recognizing that all truth is from God, and use them to point to God's highest and most glorious revelation of Himself, Jesus Christ. I also observed that beyond what they might say

to their Hindu friends, who know little of a religion of love, forebearance, and forgiveness, that the lives they live before them as caring Christians will speak louder than words.

Christians in pagan cultures must see themselves as "God's little flock" and as "a colony of heaven," to use meaningful Biblical images, and concentrate on being what the Church of Christ should be in this world, and act upon the great truth taught by our Lord, that the world will know that we are his disciples by our love one for another. We reform India by reforming ourselves. We make India Christian by making ourselves Christians. And when persecution comes, we will glorify God in it, recognizing that the called of God have always been persecuted and that the Christian faith has flourished most in time of great trial.

We must build an altar for God in each of our homes in that our children will be taught the Bible, we will pray together, and share the hope of eternal life. However dark the pagan world around us may be, we will love and respect all people, especially the untouchables, and we will, like our Lord, give women a place of respect and dignity and treat them as equals.

As Christians in the third world we will not expect or demand a distribution of wealth from our sisters and brothers in rich countries. Their riches is their problem, not ours. We will put our hope in God and do the best we can, recognizing that at no time in history has poverty been solved through the good graces of the rich. As poor Christians we will help those who are poorer than ourselves. It has always been the case, as with the aged. It is the old that take care of the old, not the young; and it is the poor that take care of the poor, not the rich. — *the Editor*

DID GANDHI GO TO HEAVEN?

What better place to write about Mahatma Gandhi than in the heart of India where I now sit. The spirit of Gandhi not only pervades this land (albeit one may wonder how deep it goes), but he is venerated by many as a virtual god. But this is not surprising, for if a people can see their mother or some distant ancestor in a Brahman cow, they should have no problem worshipping a man of Gandhi's stature.

To put it another way, I asked one educated Indian whom he would name as the greatest person in Indian history, somewhat like an American would name Washington or Lincoln. He reminded me that an American has the easier task, for his country's history involves only a few centuries, while Indian history runs for thousands of years. And so he named heroes of the distant past, but he at last conceded that if one refers to modern history that Mahatma Gandhi would unquestionably be the greatest Indian. When I observed that unlike most world

leaders that could be named, whether Churchill or Napoleon or Ceasar, that Gandhi was neither a political nor a military figure, not at least in the sense of holding an office or ruling from a throne, my friend accounted for his greatness on the grounds of the overpowering moral force of his exemplary life.

It was Gandhi's moral leadership that led to the eventual independence of India. He is the "George Washington" of India in that he delivered his people from the tyranny of British rule, and this without drawing a sword or firing a gun. But his greatest obstacle to Indian unity and freedom was not the British but his own people divided into warring religious sects. His weapons against the British were civil disobdience, non-violence, and fasting; but they were also weapons against his own recalcitrant people, who chose to fight each other rather than their common enemy. Time and again the Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs would destroy thousands of their own in bloodly massacres all across India. Gandhi pled for peace, drawing upon the principles of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. He would go on hunger strikes until his people would stop the fighting and killing, sometimes to the brink of starvation.

He at last won at least a partial victory. He united his people to the point that they ceased their self-destruction and joined him in the famous march to the sea in protest to the British tax on salt. But the internecine conflicts continued to plague India until part of it was sliced off to form Pakistan as a separate country, which Gandhi reluctantly agreed to as an alternative to a continuing civil war. He was assassinated in 1948 by a radical Hindu who blamed him for the partition of Pakistan.

Gandhi's message was always a plea for unity. He appealed to his people to be united as Indians while differing in religion. He urged Christian missionaries, who brought their sectarian differences with them to India to return home and unite, and then return with a message of love and tolerance. The Indian people would then be more likely to listen, he assured them.

There was at least one Christian missionary that agreed with Gandhi. E. Stanley Jones, author of *The Christ of the Indian Road,* realized that a divided church could never have a redemptive influence in this troubled land, so, like Gandhi, he pled for a united Christian message. A personal friend of Gandhi, Jones saw in him a spirit more like Christ than he saw in many Christians. Since Gandhi talked like a Christian, acted like a Christian, and responded to evil like a Christian, Jones looked upon him as a "Hindu Christian." The moral power of his life was more like that of Jesus than what is often seen in Christian leaders. When word spread that "Gandhi is in prison fasting" it would cause men to lay down their arms. His was a life of self-renunciation. Even though he was married to a woman he deeply loved and had children, he eventually renounced sex in an effort to commit his whole being to the consuming passion of his life, the liberation of India through moral suasion as exemplfied in the life and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth. "Resist not him who is evil" was his gospel.

When Gandhi died, someone asked E. Stanley Jones if Gandhi was in heaven. It was a loaded question, for Christians would have been offended if a Christian missionary believed a Hindu to be in heaven, and Hindus would have been offended if he believed a good man like Gandhi to be in hell. Jones' reply was not only unoffensive to either Hindus or Christians, but it was classic. He quietly responded, "If Gandhi is not in heaven, then heaven is the poorer for it."

A western Christian, who has far more than his share of this world's blessings, will not be in this third world country long before he asks himself something like "What will God do with these masses of deprived people who have no chance for the life I have had?" A little girl and her baby brother, one in rags and the other naked, stand before you begging. The boy may be snapped up into child pornography and the girl into prostitution. At best they'll be with parents that barely exist by begging and by eating from garbage cans and living under bridges or in the street, all their lives, dying young. They may have no education and never possess anything at all. They would consider themselves rich if they had what the average American puts in the garbage. They are Hindus or Muslims, nominally, but it means little to them.. They are India's untouchables who have little inclination to think about religion or to think about anything at all except to exist in an unjust and cruel world. After awhile they are fortunate enough to die. They are cremated as paupers. Free at last!

Or are they? Do they now go to a devil's hell to suffer eternally because they happened to be born in Calcutta instead of Dallas, as a Hindu instead of a Christian, in squalor instead of luxury? What will God do with them? We can always say that we do not have to make that judgment, which would be an improvement over our usual lament over "the millions who are dying and going to hell without the gospel." It is well to recognize that we cannot make that judgment for the simple reason that we cannot see into people's hearts as God can, and judgment is a matter of the heart rather than outward circumstances. But if we do any thinking at all, or have any semblance of a world view of things, we cannot but ponder the question of what God might do with all those who are not Christians, perhaps as many as three-fourths of the world's population, or nearly everyone as some would define Christian. And does the question not bear upon the kind of God we worship? If our hearts are moved when Mother Teresa provides a way for some of India's untouchables to die with dignity, what are we to think of a theology that assigns such wretched souls to an eternal hell? Do they receive mercy at her hands but wrath in God's hands?

I would answer the question as to whether Gandhi went to heaven differently from E. Stanley Jones. I doubt if heaven is poorer if Gandhi happens not to be there. I would say that if Gandhi is in heaven it will be for the same reason that anyone else is in heaven, by God's mercy. Being what the world calls a great man does not merit salvation, nor does living in poverty in this world gain paradise in the next. If we can be saved by good works or by being poor then Christ died for naught. The world was poor when our Lord came to it but it was also lost. "Him who knew no sin

became sin on our behalf," Paul assures us in 2 Cor. 5:21, and that applies to the rich and poor alike. The apostle also says, "So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy" (Ro. 9:16). In the same chapter as well as in the Old Testament God says, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion."

This can only mean that we do not receive God's mercy because we are good church members or because we have been baptized or because we do deeds of charity. The apostle clearly states that it is not by running, and some of us run ourselves tired, supposing that is the way of salvation. Paul insists that it is all a matter of God's will. He shows mercy and compassion on whom He will (period!). Titus 3:5 makes it clear that even works of righteousness do not save us but God's mercy.

But still the Scriptures make it clear that God wills to show mercy to some and not to others, and we have some indicators as to who will receive mercy and who will not. Jesus, for instance, in Lk. 18:17, says of the man who prayed, "God, be merciful to me a sinner," that he was righteous before God. We can conclude from that that we are more likely to receive mercy if we acknowledge our sin before God and plead for mercy. And Jas. 2:13 says plainly that no mercy will be shown to him who has shown no mercy to others. But even with such indicators we must show caution, for God is not bound even by Scripture. He remains the sovereign God of heaven, and He will show mercy to whom He will. But still the indicators are there and they reveal to us something of the "God of mercy," as the Bible often refers to the heavenly Father. Let us see if these principles, drawn from Scripture, help us to deal with the question before us.

1. *In Scripture there is an emphasis upon the mercy of God.*

As early as Ex 34:6 God is depicted as merciful and gracious, and as abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. And the Bible refers to "the mercy of God endures forever" over and over, more than any other one idea in Scripture. While we are not to forget that God is also a God of wrath, His wrath is always tempered by His mercy, as in Hab. 3:2, "In the midst of wrath remember mercy." We can say "God is love," as the Bible does, but we cannot say "God is wrath." The book of Hosea dramatically depicts God as a God of mercy, as in Hos. 2:19f where God says he betroths His people to him in steadfast love and in mercy. One of Paul's favorite references is to the "God of mercy." The Bible even assures us that God is *eager* to show mercy.

2. *In Scripture God's mercy is especially directed to the poor and the oppressed.*

Jesus told his hometown folk that he had come to preach the gospel to the poor (Lk. 4:18) and his blessings included "Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of heaven" (Lk. 6:20). Jesus was himself poor, though not in dire poverty, and he moved among the poor, and his mission was to "set at liberty those who are

oppressed" (Lk. 4:8). The church of the non-poor first world has been less than faithful in the way it has interpreted these passages, by making the poor refer to those who are spiritually poor. There can be no doubt that Jesus was referring to the materially poor, those with so little they cannot live decent lives. He refers to those who are in poverty from no fault of their own, to those who are oppressed by the injustices and the indifference of the rich. While the Bible says "Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries are coming upon you! (Jas. 5:1), it always refers to the poor as having God on their side.

Instead of trying to water down these facts, rich Christians are to realize that God is basically on the side of the poor and the oppressed, and that they must become more that way themselves by sharing their wealth and by opposing any measure that unjustly makes the rich richer and the poor poorer. And they must realize that God is likely to "balance the ledger" in the next world, and that mercy is likely to be more abundant toward the poor, especially those who are deprived by circumstances beyond their control. There is no indication that God favors those who are poor because of indolence. But it is a fact that the vast majority of the world's poor are poor because they can't help it and often because they are oppressed by those who are rich at their expense. To such ones our Lord said, "Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." Rich Christians must also realize that their hope, like Gandhi's or anyone else's, lies in the mercy of God, in the hope that God will forgive them for having so much while others have so little. And that too, as with the poor, because they cannot help it. There is no way for Christians in rich countries to live like those in the third world live. That would not solve the problem anyway. But when we really become concerned about the problem of severe inequality of wealth around the world, we will find things that we can do about it.

One important thing wealthy Christians can do is to arrange their wills so that their wealth will not be handed down from generation to generation, but eventually given to agencies who serve the poor of the world. We should arrange our estate, even if small, so that even if our children may need the interest that accrues during their lives, it will upon their death pass along to the poor. When our children are already rich several times over in comparison to the world's poor, most of our estate could go immediately into programs to help third world people, and there are many such worthy organizations.

In the meantime non-poor Christians should consider tithing or double-tithing for the sake of those who live in squalor, many of whom are our sisters and brothers in the Lord. Our churches who spend most of their wealth on themselves and their own sectarian programs must be persuaded that God is more concerned for the poor than for their selfish interests, and that they should be. What an example it would be if a church gave most of its income to the poverty-stricken people of the world! It would have the promise of Scripture that those who give to the poor lend to the Lord.

But whatever we conclude under this heading we cannot escape the fact that

God's mercy is more abundant toward the poor, and that fact should influence our faith.

3. *The Scriptures indicate that the oppressors of the poor are the least likely to receive God's mercy.*

Since being in India and the Philippines, where much Christian charity is evident, I have heard numerous accounts of how corrupt government officials siphon off for themselves much of what is intended for the poor. A missionary here where I am staying told of a free milk program that she directed for a charitable agency that she eventually had to stop because the milk was stolen by officials and sold to dairies. The agency told her they would be satisfied if even half of what they sent reached the children, but she could not accomplish even that. One report tells of when Union Carbide paid benefits to the victims of the tragedy at Bophal that by the time a long line of officials siphoned off their share the injured ones received but a small portion of it. In both India and the Philippines citizens themselves, not the missionaries, told me that corruption in high places is their most serious problem.

Then there are the international bankers and traders that take advantage of the underdeveloped countries, not always paying a just price for goods produced. And rich nations go on getting richer when they could, by sharing resources and know-how, greatly improve the standard of living of the poor nations. If the rich nations gave only a few percentile points of their GNP to invest in these nations, thus encouraging big business to do so, conditions could be improved almost overnight. We can only conclude that those who have are not all that concerned for those who have not. While most of us are not personally guilty of oppressing the poor, and would oppose such injustice, we may well be part of a system that is guilty.

It is such injustice toward the poor that the Bible scores, from the preaching of the prophets to the teaching of Jesus, such as the prophet Amos condemning those who "grind the heads of the poor into the earth, and thrust the humble out of the way," and those who "tread down the poor and take grain taxes from him though you have built houses of stone." And as Mary praised God in her role of giving birth to the Christ child, she said, "God has exalted those of low degree. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty" (Lk.1:52-53). And that child grew up to announce his mission as giving rest to the weary, the gospel to the poor, and liberty to the oppressed.

So, when we think in terms of the possible destiny of a Mahatma Gandhi, or of ourselves, we might be conscious of these two sides, the side of the oppressed and the side of the oppressor. Gandhi in India, like Jesus in Palestine, sought to lift up the untouchables of society and give them dignity. On what side are we? Mercy is on the side of the poor and the oppressed and those who show mercy to them.

4. *The Scriptures support the principle of available light.*

This means that a person is responsible only for what he knows and understands, and not for what he has no way of knowing. But this gives no license to *willful*

ignorance. As Paul says in Acts 17:27, God has placed people on the earth "so that they should seek the Lord in the hope that they might grope for him and find Him, though he is not far from each one of us." But millions who grope for Him never find Him because they are so deprived by impossible circumstances that they can do no more than exist on a starvation diet until they die. Others are so crushed by oppressive regimes that they have no opportunity to hear the gospel or to seek the true God of heaven.

Another way to say it is that responsibility is measured by ability. Paul lays down a principle in 2 Cor. 8:12 that applies to the whole of life: *It is required of one according to what he has, not acoording to what he has not.* Our Lord distinguished between those who had heard and those who had not: "If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin. Now, however, they have no excuse for their sin" (Jo. 15:22).

Surely we are to conclude from this that God does not expect one to respond to what he has no way of knowing. And yet we have grounds for concluding, both from reason and from Scripture, that all men have some measure of light, and that they are responsible for the light they have. This is the basis on which Paul argues in Rom. 2 that all are in sin. But surely the judgment is in reference to the light available, the greater the light the greater the responsibility.

5. *The Scriptures condemn the disbeliever, not the unbeliever.*

You will find the Bible consistent in this regard, I believe. It is the disbeliever, the one who hears and undersands his responsibility, but willfully rejects the message, that is condemned, and never the unbeliever who has had no opportunity to hear and understand.

These conclusions are not drawn to make us better judges of men's destiny, for this is a role that none of us wishes to assume. But they may help us to think more responsibly about a question that perplexes us all at one time or another. And they may especially help us to think and act more responsibly about our own soul's destiny and our relation to that troubled world out there for which our Lord died. — *the Editor.*

FAITH OF THE HEATHEN

Faith does not consist in the belief of particular doctrines, far less in the belief of doctrines which men never had an opportunity of knowing; but in such an earnest desire to know and do the will of God, as leads them conscientiously to use such means as they have, for gaining the knowledge of his will, and for doing it when found. Of this kind was Abraham's faith. Inasmuch as the influences of the Spirit of God are not confined to them who enjoy revelation, but are promised in the gracious covenant made with mankind at the fall to all who are sincere, a heathen by these influences may attain the faith just now described, and thereby may please God. For faith is more a work of the heart than of understanding.—James MacKnight, *Apostolic Epistles*, p. 63.

Visiting Other Churches...No. 10

CHRISTIAN UNITY IN A NEW ZEALAND VILLAGE

(Written in New Zealand)

To get the feel of a country one needs to avoid the usual tourist circuits and traps, where one does little more than ascend and descend from buses in a herd of other tourists. The only natives he sees are either hotel clerks, tourist guides, or someone who is trying to sell him something tourists are supposed to buy. So, when I arrived in New Zealand one week in advance of the World Convention of Churches of Christ, which I am here to attend, I avoided the tourist hotels and took a "bed and breakfast" deal (at one-third the cost) with a family that migrated from Germany. One may have to rough it a bit, such as enduring noisy kids and preparing his own skimpy meals, but after three weeks in poverty-laden India I have no inclination to follow the ways of the typical American tourist.

So I walk where I can, which is much of the time, and ride buses where I can't, avoiding taxis. I try to live like and be with the typical working man, riding alongside him on the bus and eating with him at the lunch counter. I have learned to ask the right questions so as to learn the weals and woes of a nation. The woes always dominate, and they are not all that different from one nation to the next. New Zealanders, who call themselves Kiwis, after a native bird, are like Americans and most everybody else in that their chief concern is the economy. Unemployment is high, inflation has been accelerating but is now at a single digit level, and farmers are in a depression.

Christians are alarmed over the breakdown of home and family values, moral laxness ("Our young people are living together and think nothing of it"), and an incipient secularism ("Our people live as if there is no God"). If there is any religious revival in the country it is not readily evident.

My desire to see the innards of a country has brought me to the southern part of New Zealand's north island, where I am staying with new friends, introduced to me by missionaries in the Philippines. They live on 1500 acres of hills and vales with 5,000 head of cattle and sheep, mostly the latter. I came by bus from Auckland to Palmerston North through 250 miles of impressive scenery, and we stopped at little towns along the way. I visited with native-born Kiwis on the bus, on which I was the only tourist. I tell people I'm from Texas instead of the U.S.A., and they say, "Ah, yes, all Texans are tall, but where is your big hat?"

I sat next to a young lady (21) who was enroute to see her live-in boy friend who is in prison for drunk driving. Since he is a Maorist (New Zealand's earliest settlers) and she is white they suffer the stigma of a mixed-race relationship, which includes the disapproval of her father. When I spoke of God's love and forgiveness, she boldly affirmed that she had no need of such. When I pointed to the grazing cattle

on the hills around us and asked if we are no different from those brute beasts, she indicated that there is no particular difference. But they do not write poems, compose music, or author books, I responded, and is there not a longing for something greater than ourselves in all of us?, I asked. She had no such longing, she insisted. When I spoke of life's heartaches and tragedies and observed that there is no way to deal with these except through faith, hope, and love, she revealed that she had lost a baby, out of wedlock of course, and that she handled it just fine on her own.

When I told a Christian woman what the girl on the bus had said about losing her baby, she accused her of bluffing, which was something like my own reaction. Nonetheless, when I spoke tenderly to her of how God loved her and that Christ had died for her, it apparently meant nothing to her. As she left the bus and walked toward the prison, we waved goodbye, and I was left to marvel with a heart full of pity, over what irreligion does to some people. I remember her as looking like Elizabeth Taylor must have looked at 21, very beautiful and lots of makeup and an uncanny arrogance, almost inhuman. In my mind's eye I see her waving her farewell and walking toward the prison, at least showing a commitment to a lover of another race and that at some sacrifice — and yet without God and without hope. May God in His mercy grant that she may one day seek after God and find Him.

On this same trip I met a religious absolutist, one to whom it is inconceivable that by the bowels of Christ he might be wrong about anything at all. He is anti-church and refuses fellowship with any church, and gets his revelation directly from God, who speaks directly to him. I suggested a look at Heb. 1:1-2, " In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son," but he was not impressed. Religion, such as it was, had done a job on him comparable to what irreligion had done to the girl on the bus.

It is a cold spring day here in New Zealand, but it is beautiful to behold. I look out the large window beside me upon an array of hills, carpeted with rich green grass, bathed in sunlight, and dotted with hundreds of sheep, which appear to graze ceaselessly. The lambs are careful to stay near their mothers. But the flock is relatively secure, the main predators threatening them are the diseases they are prey to.

When I visited the wool shed one day for several hours, I saw some of the precautions taken to ward off various infections. While it is yet too early for general shearing, they were cleaning the sheep, one by one, by shearing away the dirty wool, especially from their bottoms. This keeps the worm flies from laying their eggs in the sensitive areas. There is also periodic spraying. A lamb's tail is also removed for sanitation purposes. The tail eventually drops off after a tight band is applied to cut off circulation, all presumably without pain.

I was impressed with the skill of the shearers, who work with power equipment. Two men cleaned more than 600 sheep the day I visited the shed. Working side by side, each man has a supply of sheep in a holding pen near him. He opens the door,

grabs a sheep, rests it on its bottom and across his leg, shears away the dirty wool, and then pushes the sheep down a chute to the floor below, all in little more than a minute. I noticed that the sheep were docile and cooperative in all this, and was told it is due to the skill with which they are handled. But one could remember the line from the prophet Isaiah, "As the sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth." My job was to sweep up the wool on the floor, separating the dirty wool from the not so dirty. They bring different prices on the market.

They completely sheared a couple of sheep for my benefit. I did not realize that the clippers go right to the skin, leaving the sheep almost completely denuded. And a skilled shearer takes off large hunks of the wool at a time. When I held one piece close, I could feel the warmth from the sheep's body, a bit sticky, and it was like holding a thick wool coat. The denuded sheep looked like a different animal without their wool. I worried that they would have a hard time of it without their coats during the cold night, but was told that they would do just fine. It takes only a few months for them to grow another coat of wool ready for the market.

On the Lord's day that I was here I went with my hosts to the Holy Trinity Episcopal church in nearby Woodville, which happened to be the one Sunday in the year that all five churches in town were meeting together. It was their unity Sunday, and it was the first time ever that I was in an assembly made up of all the churches in a town, five of them in a town of 1500. They were the Episcopal, who was the host church, the Roman Catholic, the Church of the Brethren, the Union Church (Presbyterian-Methodist), and the Salvation Army. Many took part in the service, some from each of the churches, including women and children. The Lord's prayer for the unity of his people was emphasized and it was taken seriously. It was all done reverently and with grace. A visitor would get the impression that it was no problem for them to be together and worship together. Those from the Salvation Army were in their uniforms. The Roman Catholics were represented in the pulpit by a reader. No priest was present and none lived in the small town.

Even though it was but a village I could not believe that *every* church in town was meeting together. Isn't there some fundamentalist group that will not meet with you?, I asked incredulously. There are only the five churches in Woodville, I was assured, and they all dismissed their services and met as one church at the Episcopal facility. I well knew that if my own Church of Christ folk had a congregation here, as well as some Christian Churches, they would not cooperate. I found myself supposing that there was a Church of Christ in this village and how I might persuade them to join the unity effort. I would urge that they have an early service in which they would break bread according to their conviction (and mine), and then go as a group to the unity service.

The other churches in town would be impressed if a Church of Christ, with a commitment to weekly Communion, would meet at an earlier hour in order to break bread, and yet be present for the unity effort. It might well cause the other churches to consider the place of weekly observance, or to at least have Communion on unity

Sunday, which they do not.

But it would be the rare Church of Christ that would attend such a unity gathering on any condition. Isn't it as strange as it is tragic that a people who began as a unity movement should become so isolated from other believers as to have no association with them at all? One would suppose, our heritage being what it is, that the Church of Christ would be at the forefront of any unity effort. But it is predictable that if all the churches except one in any given town met in a unity service the Church of Christ would be that exception. We owe it to ourselves to face up to the question of how we can be serious about being a unity people when we won't have anything to do with anyone else.

My overall impression of the unity service in a New Zealand village is that they quietly practice, at least occasionally, what some of the rest of us only talk about. They make it work, at least once a year, and one is left to ask why there can't be more of what they do one Sunday a year. The service was general and the teaching general — a unity based on "general Christianity," to use a term our pioneers used as a basis for the unity of all believers, or what C. S. Lewis called "mere Christianity." After all, we all worship the same Christ, we sing the same hymns and pray the same prayers. We have far more in common than we have differences.

I soon leave this remote part of New Zealand to return to Auckland to attend the World Convention of Churches of Christ. I am looking forward to leading some of the discussion groups that will be celebrating the birthday bicentennial of Alexander Campbell. I am eager to point out to them that Campbell pled for a unity based on what all Christians agree to in common, not unlike the service I was a part of in a village in the backwoods of New Zealand, where every church in town met together and worshipped God on the basis of what they all hold in common, particularly their faith in Christ as the Lord of glory. — *the Editor.*

OUR CHANGING WORLD

When I returned from the Orient after my 45-day journey, I called Ouida from Los Angeles to let her know I had arrived safely. I asked, "Is this the editor of *Restoration Review*?" She replied, "No, this is the former editor, for I just resigned!" She did a great job in putting out the last issue, and among the endearing terms by which she is known about the house is "former editor." There are of course more endearing terms than that!

With this issue we conclude another volume. The January issue will begin our 37th year of publication, the 31st year under the name *Restoration Review*. The new theme will be on the hope of the believer, which we plan to develop over the next two years. We hope you will be with us for this series. We are confident it will encourage you.

Hollywood has never hesitated to assault the Christian faith in both cinema and TV, even to the point of ridicule, presuming it could get by with it, as it usually does. But it may have gone too far in its production of The Last Temptation of Christ. The American Family Association, led by Donald Wildmon, to which Ouida and I belong, reports that it helped to boycott the movie to the extent that only 1% of the nation's theatres have shown it, only about 130 of 13,000. The AMF distributed four millon petitions to theatres and worked through nearly 1,000 Christian radio and TV stations in staging the boycott. It looks as if the movie will lose upward of $12,000,000. But it is left to Warren L. McFerran in *The New American* to describe the movie for what it is: "It is clearly blasphemous and heretical. It contains a powerful message and has a distinct purpose. It turns all truth upside down: right becomes wrong, and wrong become right; evil becomes good, and good becomes evil. The betrayer of Jesus is the hero; worshipping the flesh is worshipping God; Satan is God; God is Satan; love is lust. The Savior needs to be saved; the Forgiver needs forgiveness. There is only one word that can fully describe this movie and the force behind it: Antichrist!" Ouida and I boycotted it, which does not mean much since we boycott nearly all movies. But there is no reason for us to be surprised when Hollywood and the world hate Jesus Christ.

In his church bulletin from Houston John Wright tells how delightfully surprised he was, even shocked, by what he heard while listening to preaching over his car radio. The preacher didn't shout and there was no pompous "preacher voice." He simply talked about the Scriptures in a simple, straightforward manner. He closed by thanking the people for their responses, and then — and this is what was too much for John Wright — he asked that they please send no money since the program is already paid for! He was pleased to learn that it was a Church of Christ program out of Abilene.

If you collect goofs, here is one from a church bulletin that might win first prize: "The Church of christ in Huntsville, Texas will host a Gospel Singing Saturday night." It was probably a foiled effort to obey our unwritten law of referring to ourselves as "the church of Christ," and the typist got his c's crossed. But some wag could see in this a Freudian slip, indicating how we have exalted the church, *our* church, above Jesus Christ.

Angela Woodhall reports from Zambia (Africa) that a Church of Christ there has solved its unemployment problem by organizing work groups in the areas of pottery, art, woodcarving, and carpentry. They sell enough locally to employ 42 people, and they hope to start exporting.

READER'S EXCHANGE

On what then can we unite? On the same basis Christians have always united, not on a thing, not on doctrines, not on a creed written or unwritten, not even on the Bible alone. Only on a Person, the crucified and risen Lord of glory. He is our only hope for salvation and our only ground for unity. — *Jim Gregory, Wichita, Ks.*

Thanks so much for your timely and liberating teaching. You are helping to unshackle the bondage of legalism among many souls, including myself. — *Sam Belo, Evansville, In.*

Keep up the good work. The combination of style in your writing — folksy, scholarly, spiritual, and perceptive — is a rare jewel. And you can quote me in your letters! — *Nancy Meyers, Keller. Tx.*

(Ouida and I especially appreciated this word of encouragement from a dear friend, especially the last sentence. Because of who she is she could be criticized for being seen in public with the likes of me. The liberated woman! Besides, it isn't everyday that an